

1858

"PEACE IN DEATH."

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A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. JAMES.

TORONTO,

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 7TH, 1858,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE LAMENTED DEATH OF MRS. J. S. HOWARD.

BY THE REV. EDMUND BALDWIN, M. A.,
ASSISTANT MINISTER.

• TORONTO:

MAULAN, THOMAS & CO., PRINTERS,
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SERMON.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.”—PSALM xxxvii. 37.

How blessed the work of alluring sinners to the paths of pleasantness and peace ! And how powerful is the force of example in winning them to Christ ! No words are so strong as the influence of a holy life and a peaceful end. Nothing so impresses the minds of the thoughtless and gay with the reality of the Christian’s hopes, as the sight of his calm and tranquil passage to the better world.

Our words from the pulpit may be assented to, their justice and truth may be acknowledged, and yet there may be secret unbelief all the while in the heart, preventing any profitable impression upon the soul. But when from the solemn instructions of the pulpit, you turn to the still more solemn and impressive lessons of the sick bed—when you enter “the chamber where the good man meets his end,” and see him filled with joy, and peace, and heavenly expectation, where is that man who would deny the power of true religion ? yea, where is he who would not feel a longing to experience the power of the Word of God on his own soul,

and breathe forth as a hearty prayer that which was only Balaam's ineffectual wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my last end be like his?"

As the Psalmist has taught us to mark well the conduct and end of the righteous, it is our duty, from time to time, as the servants of God are removed, to draw your attention to the evidences of their union with Christ; and to encourage you by speaking of the heavenly consolations which in death they enjoyed, in exact fulfilment of the precious promises of the Gospel.

We find, and every observer who marks God's dealings with His upright, consistent, and faithful servants will find the same thing also, that whatever trials, temptations, and disquietudes they may have had during a great part of their lives, their closing scene is tranquil and comfortable. But a contrary, and a dreadful end sooner or later awaits the ungodly; for the end of the ungodly man shall be that he dies without hope, is "driven away in his wickedness," and perishes for ever.

Before speaking of our sister in Christ, for many years a member of this congregation, and whose truly happy end has suggested this subject for our meditation upon this solemn occasion; I would draw your attention to this point, that the Word of God most clearly teaches you, that if you would contemplate a peaceful end, you must look out for the perfect and upright man. Life and death are connected together as much as seed time and harvest. To learn to die,

you must first learn to live. To have peace in your death, you must have peace in your life. To feel in dying that you are complete in Christ, you must seek and find acceptance with God in Christ while you are living. It is folly, to suppose that in leaving the world you can be upheld by the consolations of religion if you know not what they are ; or that Christ Jesus if you know Him not nor love Him, will deign to support you with the manifestations of His presence and love.

It is the desire of all men to die in peace : whatever you are doing, however you are neglecting preparation for your great change, you hope to be able to close your eyes in peace. When that hour comes, you will be ready to express your belief in those Gospel truths which formerly you may have overlooked or despised ; or to make any effort within your power, if thereby you can calm your troubled breast, and be enabled to leave this world with some hope of a better. Contemplate then the end of the true Christian ; mark well the life of the child of God ; and may God incline our hearts so to follow the steps of her and of all those " who now by faith and patience inherit the promises, that like theirs our end may be peace."

And who is the perfect man ? When we are all encompassed with infirmity, when each one carries about with him a body of sin and death, who can be said to be perfect ? There is no one of whom this can be said, save of Jesus Christ ; in Him alone there was no sin ; when Satan tempted Him, he found

nothing in Him that was common with himself. Jesus was the only one in our nature who did "no iniquity, and in whose spirit there never was any guile." But Jesus came in our nature that the perfection of His obedience might be available for the acceptance of guilty man. He is the great Head of His Church, and being perfect, all who are in Him are perfect also. Every believer in Him, who by faith is united to Him, is perfectly justified, because to him is imputed the perfect righteousness of his surety; he has a "new heart and a right spirit," even the spirit of Christ Jesus given to him; he is always progressing in holiness as the child of God, and in the end shall be completely sanctified and glorified in the kingdom of Heaven.

How exalted then the position which the true Christian occupies! He is perfect, not in himself, for he sinneth daily, but as he is included in Jesus—is one with Him—is hid in the person of Christ, who answers to God the Father for all who trust in Him—and is "bound up in the bundle of life" with the Lord of Glory. Here is perfection; to be "complete in Christ!" He therefore that would have present peace and depart in peace, must seek for union with the Saviour, must be first "justified by faith," and then he will have "peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord"—and whatever man may object to the seeming unsubstantial nature of this perfection, viz., the being perfect through another's perfection, the being complete by a union with Him in whom there is no-

thing wanting, we assert that there is no other kind of perfection for a sinner, and moreover that it is of a very positive nature.

Men who do not themselves see, that which she who has gone from among us clearly did, that Jesus is "the Lord their righteousness," and who do not glory in Him alone, will ever undervalue a righteousness which is obtained by imputation; and even if they should declare the licentiousness of such a doctrine, it need not excite the least surprise. But this theoretical perfection, as some are pleased to call it, is in the end the only practical perfection. It is the only doctrine that of being found perfect by faith in Christ Jesus, which really operates upon the heart and brings forth fruit in the life. There is nothing which so weans a man from sin, as believing that all his sins are imputed to Jesus his substitute; nothing that makes a man die unto sin so surely, as the believing that Jesus has died for his sins; nothing that so effectually delivers a man from the tyranny of sin, as the believing that he is quite set free from its curse.

I say this advisedly, because the fruits of a truly spiritual life are not to be found, save in those only who "rejoice in" their acceptance through "Jesus Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh." You will ever find that the sinner who glories only in the Saviour, abounds most in prayer,—is most full of love for Christ and his fellow-sinners,—is most attached to the word of God,—is most attentive to the alleviating of human misery,—finds most delight in

the fellowship of Christian minds, and awaits with most pleasure the coming of the Lord.

In this we have the picture of the perfect man, who is indeed one who *delights in the Scriptures*. He has no sympathy with those whose morbid fancies make them eschew the Bible as a dangerous book, fit only to be read, as the Church of Rome says, by priests; and who plainly show that they place far more importance and value upon their participation in the sacraments, than upon the study of the unadulterated word of the Living God. To the Christian the Bible is ever his daily guide and his counsellor, his companion in prosperity, his friend in adversity; in it he always finds a word for every season, and rejoices over its precious treasures as one that findeth great spoils. Show me the man who has not any love for the word of God, who does not delight in it after the inward man, and the same is not a perfect man; and if you follow him to his end, you will find that that end is not peace.

Mark the perfect man and you will find also that he has *great love for the Lord Jesus Christ*. It must be so, for the Bible teaches us that if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is accursed; now the Christian is not condemned, he is free from the curse, he must therefore be filled with affection for his Redeemer. And so great is it, that it is impossible for the perfect or upright man to tell all his love for Christ: it is with him an overpowering, absorbing and constraining principle: he sees Jesus in every-

thing, he feels that his deliverance from death, his hope of glory, the comforts of this life, his support in temptations, his patience in adversity, are all owing to the presence of Christ with his soul, and this makes him exclaim of Him whose love has planned and is accomplishing so many mercies for him, "Oh ! thou whom my soul loveth." His indebtedness to Christ is so great, the remission of his debt of ten thousand talents places him under such immense obligations to the Lord, that he never wearies of hearing or of reading of Him, and delights always in communing with Him in prayer, and in speaking of Him to all with whom he may come in contact. She who has lately been taken from among us, was preëminently full of simple and unaffected love for her Saviour ; and her end was peace.

The Christian also *loves to see the image of Christ reflected in himself and others.* The thought that Jesus has died for his sins, always makes him anxious to die unto sin. What his master hated, and still hates, he also hates and eschews. His heart is purified by faith, and he is never content while he finds any evil to overcome within him. Sin in himself or others is always a grievous trial to him, he weeps over his shortcomings and infirmities, and longs and prays for such gifts of the Holy Spirit, as will enable him to mortify every lust, and will make the words of his mouth, and the meditations of his heart to be always acceptable in the sight of God and his Redeemer. And she who has gone to her rest had

much of this spirit ; she mourned the sins and iniquities that prevailed around, and proved by her conduct and words that she had "learned of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and she found rest unto her soul."

Wherein also peace marks the death, *concern for the souls of others* will ever be found to characterize the life of the Christian. The man who does not care to alleviate the wants of others, and above all to supply their spiritual need, who does not feel some anxiety about the salvation of his fellow men, who never trembles for the unconverted, never encourages the penitent, or supports the weak, cannot know Jesus as his own Saviour ; cannot look with any terror upon the pit of destruction, or feel any gratitude to Christ for his deliverance from it.

It is with every true Christian as it was with Barnabas ; every one that is full of the Holy Ghost and of faith always rejoices and is glad when he sees the grace of God manifested in the renewed life of the sinner. How can this be otherwise ? Unconverted men may show great concern about the temporal affairs of their fellows, but a converted man knows the worth of his soul, and therefore his first thoughts respecting others are, do they know the Lord ? are they penitent believers ? are they possessed of a reasonable hope of everlasting life ? And as his thoughts, so are his actions ; he deals with his fellow-sinners about their souls : he tries to win them to Christ ; he warns them about attachment to the

world ; gently but firmly reproves them for sin ; and recommends to them the blessings of the Gospel in no way more strongly, than by the cheerfulness and comfort which he manifests in himself, as the fruit of his own affiance in the Lord.

And no one could have known our departed friend, without noticing how ardently she longed for the conversion and salvation of all whom she knew ; her love for souls was displayed to the very last in the faithful advice and affectionate words, which, in behalf of Jesus, she spoke or sent to those with whom she was acquainted.

I do not say that she of whom I have been speaking, or that any Christian is really perfect ; but I do say, that you cannot find a true Christian, who does not display his oneness with his Master by his frequency in prayer, by his love for the words of Jesus, by his obedience to His commandments, by his desire after holiness, and by his affectionate wish to lead as many as he can to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. All this can be, and indeed is found mixed up with many infirmities of the flesh, which proves not the absence of all grace, but confirms the humbling doctrine of our Church, that the evil disposition of our fallen nature, which reigns triumphant in the unconverted man, retains no mean measure of its strength in the regenerate.

But it is time now to ask, what is the end of the perfect man ? It is peace. The Christian " has hope in his death, he enters into peace." When the ungodly

come to die they are in great terror about their sins ; they feel that they have been grievous transgressors, their unholy living comes up a fearful picture before them, and with the words in their ears "that without holiness no man shall see the Lord," they are distracted with fears, and like the "troubled sea cannot rest." But when the believer comes to his end, whatever his shortcomings, however many and grievous his fears about his safety, he generally departs in peace. As he trusted in Jesus in life, He is with him in death, and "keeps his soul in perfect peace because he trusted in Him." His spiritual faculties are increased as he draws near to heaven ; the Saviour then seems more precious to him ; the love of God to him in Christ appears greater ; and all his debts being paid by his Surety he cannot but be in peace ; his language is

"And now my God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear ;
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear."

He has peace in his conscience, he delighteth in holiness, and now he sees that God was with him, and working in him ; and in the words of the Apostle attributes all that has been done for him and in him to His sovereign grace, "By the grace of God," he says, "I am what I am." And as his deliverance from sin showed that God loved him, so his continuance in the paths of holiness convinces him of the constant favour of God ; and assuring him of the support to the end of His everlasting arms, it keeps him in peace, and makes him joyfully wait for the salvation of his Lord.

I have witnessed many death beds, and rejoice in being able to say that many were peaceful, and many were hopeful ; but I do not think that ever it was my privilege to witness the departure of a soul more fully sustained by the hand of the Lord, or more possessed in peace by reliance on the Lord of life and glory, than her's to whom I have referred. In that sick room patience had her perfect work ; there was not only a resignation to the will of God that was unmurmuring, but a resignation that almost amounted to cheerfulness in the midst of sufferings the most intense, that bespoke the perfect calm within. There was a holy indifference to earthly things ; there was a most blessed freedom from the assaults of Satan, too often known by great fears and anxieties ; and there was a calm and delightful expectation of that promised good which awaited the soul on its release from its tabernacle of clay. Truly her end was peace, and God did indeed "keep her soul in perfect peace, because she stayed herself upon Him."

To those who are not in Christ, and who therefore are not walking before him blamelessly, the text suggests a most solemn warning. Do not think that your end will be peace. You have not the slightest reason to expect it ; you are not living for peace ; you are a stranger to the Prince of Peace ; you are not washed nor sanctified, and how can your end be anything else but one of stupid unconcern, or of harrowing despair at the thought of everlasting wrath ? Oh, be won to Christ ! think of those who found great delight in be-

lieving and in doing the will of the Lord, think of their comfort and satisfaction in dying, and go to Jesus for yourself. Go and ask Him to wash you in His blood, go and beg of Him His Spirit, that you may walk before Him in newness of life ; then shall your soul be quieted because God's anger is turned away from you, and in death you shall have peace ; you shall feel that God is your God, and that underneath you are the everlasting arms, and painful though the review of your life may be, your soul will be calm in the knowledge that with you, as with David of old, the "Lord has made an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, and this will be all your hope and all your salvation."

To those who are really resting on Jesus, who are really trying to glorify Him in all things, but are frequently tried by fears as to their state, the death of our sister in the Lord speaks the gracious words of comfort "Be strong and of a good courage." She died in peace ; and timid and fearful though you may be as indeed she sometimes was, and often though you may ask "do I love the Lord or no," when you come to die your fears will be removed ; Jesus will manifest Himself more than ever to your souls, and enable you to say to him, "though I pass through the valley of the shadow of Death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

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